

Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Montana Historical Society in Helena
Minutes – June 25, 2015

Prior to the meeting we had time and Ellen Baumler gave several of us a tour of their wonderful new exhibit: Our Forgotten Pioneers: the Chinese in Montana

Attendance: board members: Becky Henne, Mike Mergenthaler, Lynette Kemp, Carol Eichler, Pat Hansen, Ellen Baumler, David Williams, Paul Marsh; Participants: Crystal Dutton, Leona Rodreck, Pat Doyle, Melanie Sanchez, Carellen Nix, Cathy Burwell, Stephanie Munk, Jim Tucker, Erin Day, Pat Lewis, Partners Creative: Suzanne Elfstrom; Tempest Technologies: Katya Peterson, Debbie Carlstrom, Shawn Peterson; Montana Historical Society welcome by Bruce Wittenberg, Director

At 11:05 a.m. Vice President Becky Henne called the meeting to order. We went around the room and did a self-introduction. Bruce Wittenberg, Director, welcomed us to the Montana Historical Society and talked about how he appreciates what we do and really wants to work with us.

Becky thanked the Montana Historical Society for hosting us. We had another brochure exchange. The Forest Service had CD's for anyone who wants to print out information for travelers. They also have information on their website.

Mike Mergenthaler moved to approve the minutes and David Williams seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Under public comment we went around the room and talked about the upcoming events and news in our communities. Many great events are coming up and lots of great information was exchanged.

Sarah had a handout for the financial report. Our funds dwindled down quite low but we now are back up with the latest check from the bed tax. As of May 31, 2015 we had \$2,621.28 in our state checking and \$152.58 in our money market account. We have \$9,812.26 in our membership account. We are rounding out the fiscal year and starting the new one July 1st. Mike moved that the financial report be approved. Carol seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Sarah reported that we had a familiarization (FAM) tour that we shared with Yellowstone Country and Glacier Country titled "Small Town + Big Eats." The tour group was enthusiastic and seemed to really enjoy their trip. We are also partnering on a Mega Fam Tour with Marlee Iverson from the Montana Office of Tourism (MTOT); we have many tour operators for this one and it goes from Southeast Montana to Glacier County. This FAM tour is already at capacity so we are hoping for great results.

Sarah asked anyone interested in working with Ed Banderob on the National Heritage project to please contact her and she will put you in touch with him. The travel guide committee has met and will meet a couple more times on changes to the travel guide. They are looking at cutting down on the pages and making some sectional changes.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout submitted a call center report. Just a week before the end of June they handled 9,458 inquiries; 12,218 guides were sent so far in 2015 which is a 46% increase over last year. This is due to a promotion we did with Yellowstone Journal. We got 841 inquiries from our website, 683 from Explore History postcard and 104 from the True West Magazine reader service.

History and ghost towns were the main interest followed by wildlife watching, Lewis and Clark Trail and the regional hot springs. Most inquiries came from California, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado.

The Tourism Advisory Council met in early June. Our marketing plan and budget was approved. The Voices of Tourism and Tourism Matters are looking at a restructure that will be presented more at a later date. There have been some changes at the Montana Office of Tourism. They are now combined with the Business Resource Division. There have been some position changes and a new name is yet to be determined.

Pamela Kimmey was absent from the meeting and will report at the next meeting on the travel guide and the changes proposed by the travel guide committee.

Suzanne Elfstrom, Partners Creative, gave us marketing updates. She had talked about the landing page and that we had 22,505 clicks, 29% engagement. The newsletter had 610 clicks, ghost towns had 405 clicks and most popular tours had 398 clicks. Total time of the page was 4:46 minutes. Suzanne talked about True West and our Native Inclusion Package. The E-blast went to 13,000 subscribers. We had banner ads and social media posts. We were able to reach 177,296 people. Had 9,686 likes and 2,538 links clicked. We also had 1371 shares and 452 comments. She had a Trip Advisor report. Trip Advisor had under reported the photos in the past. So, the photos for April and May went up considerable. We had 847 photo views in April and 962 photo views in May. Our interaction rates for April and May were 21.87% and 21.89%. Total clicks were 1,030 and 1,228 respectively. We are hoping for a niche grant to help with some of our historical and bicycling projects.

Debbie Carlstrom from Tempest Technologies talked about our social media. As a side note she pointed out that our blogger, Burt, was out with some buddies and they were randomly given a bag of taffy by our friends at the Sweet Palace. They were thrilled. Debbie said that we are now doing Instagram and have a schedule set up for postings. They have a road map planned for all the social media. They have increased the newsletter circulation substantially due to the Yellowstone Journal marketing. We are now up over 10,000 people for this compared to 4,720 in March and April. Katya reported that a new blog is on our website, check out the *Park to Park Blog*: <http://southwestmt.com/blog/>. Pinterest is not as big as a draw but still gets interest and it hits another audience.

Shawn Peterson updated us on the website. "*Lively Times*" had us in a holding pattern as they didn't realize that they would be working with the regions and convention and visitor bureau's (cvb's) when MTOT hired them to do their current events. We now will do a nightly pull from the information. The community photo problems are now fixed and getting downloaded our website. They have worked on the backend of the new responsive website redesign. They will be meeting with the website committee to work on further details for the layout.

They are looking at doing a digital grant as well to help improve mapping and display video footage at various strategic tourism locations. They were able to get substantial footage for the spring this year due to the longer weather cooperating season. If anyone wants to submit some ideas for consideration for video please contact Sarah or Shawn.

Our next meeting is to be determined at a later time. We might have an executive board meeting in August. President Pamela Kimmey will be giving direction on this. Meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Everyone was welcome to tour the new exhibit and the museum, compliments of Montana Historical Society.